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DEPT FOR NEA DAS DIBBLE, NEA/ARP, PI
CAIRO FOR STEVE BONDY

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SUBJECT: PART I: PARTING THOUGHTS ON BAHRAIN'S POITCIAL AND
ECONOMIC SITUATION: SUMMARY

Classified By: Ambassador Ronalt E. Neumann. Reasons 1.4 (B)(D).

This cable contains the summary of my parting reflections on
Bahrain.

Summary

1. (S) Not yet democratic, its stability potentially challenged by a rejectionist Shia opposition, unemployment and cultural backlash, Bahrain has yet managed significant advances in political freedom and economic liberalization in the nearly three years of my tour. Its already complex political geography of different agendas between King, PM, parliament, and constitutional rejectionists has been further complicated by the growth of conservative Sunnis with a radical fringe.

2. (S) King Hamad is the fulcrum. He transformed the nature of the political debate. I believe he will allow further change, but the pace will be slower than in 2000-2002 and he will insist it come through the parliament. Thus the rejectionist opposition will not achieve through extra-parliamentary dialogue the fundamental reordering of power they seek. Lacking the resources to force change, the opposition continues seeking controversies with some looking for a violent reaction that would rally their Shia base. Hamad has dodged this sectarian confrontation, but has had to sacrifice some law and order to do so. He may have decided to use Shia policemen to restore credibility, and take an issue from the rejectionists. A struggle will go on at least until the 2006 election when the opposition will face the stark choice of participating or splitting. Some violence is possible.

3. (S) We have the right mix of policies; supporting participants in political evolution with patience and MEPI programs and encouraging rejectionists to participate while not accepting their claims that they are the only democrats. Our programs in law reform and education are part of building a civic society, but it is important to remember that this is still a fragile situation with few democratic habits where unemployment, political shocks from outside -- including deeply resented American policies -- could empower the opposition and set back the evolutionary pace. In this mix our support for job creation through the FTA and economic reform remains essential. The result will be felt in the rest of the Gulf. Our resources have been significantly increased to meet our new tasks. It is essential that we maintain the support necessary for our mission. End Summary.
NEUMANN